

At the present time the custom of *terersthi* has a far wider range. It is obvious that when a widower takes the wife of another he is simply transferring his difficulty, and the man whose wife he has taken will have to seek a new partner. It often happens that a man takes the wife of a boy married, perhaps, to a girl of about the same age as himself, and when this boy reaches manhood he will have to seek a wife and will naturally try to obtain the wife of another rather than be content with a child perhaps only three or four years of age. It would be impossible that such a custom as that of *terersthi* should remain limited in scope, but there is no doubt that at the present day it has become the custom for any man who takes a fancy for the wife of another to endeavour to obtain her for himself, and I was told that he would give large bribes to the elders of the Todas to attain his object. It seems quite clear that, at the present time, it is not considered necessary to obtain the consent either of the wife or of the husband, and in some cases the wife has been taken from her husband by force.¹

In some recent cases the aggrieved parties in such disputes have appealed to the Government, and during my visit a petition was being drawn up for presentation to the Governor of Madras, asking that the abuses of the *terersthi* custom should be remedied.

DIVORCE

Divorce exists among the Todas quite apart from the transference of wives just considered.

I was told that a man divorces his wife for two reasons, and for two only, the first reason being that the wife is a fool and the second that she will not work. Barrenness is not generally regarded as a reason for divorce, though I was told of one case in which a man had sent away his wife on this account. It seemed more usual in such a case to take a second wife. In some cases the illness of the husband has been regarded as a ground for divorce. Intercourse between

¹ For an instance see p. 535.

578
674

worse was, to begin with, ever brought to my notice by my informants.

[754]

When, however, I delved more deeply into the matter, I soon found out that appearances were very deceptive, and that under a peaceful exterior, many serious acts of aggression had taken and were still taking place. Personal feuds of intense hatred and jealousy, especially among the older men, seemed to be the reasons for what were not just empty accusations of witchcraft, but unmistakably crimes, and I gathered so much evidence of this that I have come to think that there are very

[682]
[648]

few influential old Todas who die a natural death. They are more usually done away with by their rivals, through the time-honoured method of having them poisoned by the Kurumbas, mainly, I think, with *datura*.

578
682[754]
[115]

[662]

Thus Karnoz of Melgarsh (45), whom I got to know very well, was greatly feared as a *pili* (sorcerer). When I returned to the Nilgiris for the second time in 1949, I found that he had reputedly done away with Ujar (48), my old and trusted informant, his uncle and chief of the Melgarsh *modol*, simply because he wished to take his place at the head of the clan. He had had him poisoned by his "own" Kurumbas, as it was put to me, after having first got the deceased's wife and two children out of the way in the same manner. The remaining members of the murdered man's family had fled in terror to Kakhwurkh *mad* and their house stood empty and forlorn at Melgarsh when I came back there in 1949. Karnoz was fined Rs. 12 by the *noim* for this crime and warned that, if he persisted in practising sorcery, his house would be set on fire, and he himself killed.

[683]
[623]

While working with the widow of Kuriolv (52), whom Rivers describes in such eloquent terms (see *The Todas*, pp. 551-2), my wife discovered that, after having rid himself of rivals and wives alike by the habitual Toda method of indirect poisoning through the agency of the Kurumbas, he was himself murdered in the same way by his wife. He ended his life practically at the same time as his rival and victim Arjgur (56) who, in a neighbouring house at Kuur, died from the effects of the poison which he, Kuriolv, had himself administered to him.

[648]

[761]

[123]

[757]

During my second stay in the Nilgiris in 1949, Pillar (52) poisoned Tödhem of Apersgor because he had had a son by a woman whom Pillar had given up, believing her to be barren. The deed was committed by a Kurumba in Pillar's pay who gave the poison with some milk to Tödhen at a funeral which I attended. I later tried to get the ailing man to hospital in Ootacamund in order to look better into his case as well as to try to save him, but to no avail. I came up against